

Collecting Private Archives: The University of Calgary Experience

The University of Calgary is a relatively young institution – it will celebrate its 40th anniversary next year. Yet for most of its existence it has been actively acquiring private records in a wide variety of subject areas. During the past five or six years this activity has increased quite dramatically, both in scope and in volume.

In this paper I propose to look at private records collecting activities at the University of Calgary. I will begin by giving an overview of the units that are acquiring such records. I will then attempt to explain the impetus for the emphasis on private records collecting at the University and what is behind the recent increase in these activities and how they have been influenced by broader university policy. Finally, I am going to touch on some of the issues we have experienced at the University of Calgary which arise from collecting private records.

Where on Earth is Calgary?

I wanted to start off my talk today by putting my comments about collecting private archives at the University of Calgary into context for you. Many of you may never have heard of Calgary or have any idea of where it is.

This map (illustration 1) shows our location in western Canada within the province of Alberta. Calgary is just to the east of the Rocky Mountains and is about 300 kilometres north of the Canada/United States border.

The Context: The University of Calgary

The University of Calgary was established as an autonomous institution in 1966.

However, its roots date back to 1905 when the Calgary Normal School – a training facility for teachers – was established in the city. The location of the Normal School in Calgary was a consolation prize for the city which had failed in its attempts to have the new provincial university (The University of Alberta) located there. Instead the University of Alberta was situated in Edmonton, the provincial capital city to the north of Calgary.

In 1945, soldiers returning home from the front and demanding access to post-secondary education resulted in the Calgary Normal School being subsumed into the University of Alberta's new Calgary-based Faculty of Education. From 1945 until autonomy was achieved in 1966 the institution which would later become the University of Calgary was a satellite campus of the University of Alberta. Over that 20 year period the programs offered at the "University of Alberta at Calgary" gradually expanded beyond the field of education into the humanities, sciences, commerce, physical education, engineering, continuing education and graduate studies.

In the 2004-2005 academic year the University had 16 Faculties, 53 departments and more than 30 research institutes and centres.

It has professional programs in Engineering, Law, Medicine, Nursing, Social Work, and will begin accepting students into the new Veterinary Medicine program in the fall of 2006.

Total enrolment this past year reached more than 28,500 students, and there are 2,200 academic staff and 2,800 support staff.

Structure of Archives and Special Collections

The University of Calgary has been actively acquiring private records since 1971. It now has four units which collect primary source materials: the Canadian Architectural Archives, the Museum of the Regiments Library and Archives, Special Collections, and the University Archives. Together these four units form the department of Archives and Special Collections. Managers of each of the four units report to the department's Assistant Director. (illustration 2)

Structure of Information Resources

Archives and Special Collections is a department within the Division of Information Resources at the University of Calgary.

This diagram (illustration 3) shows the structure of Information Resources and names the other units contained within the Division, including the University Library, the Nickle Arts Museum, the Image Centre, and the University Press.

Prior to the creation of Archives and Special Collections two years ago, the Canadian Architectural Archives, Special Collections and the Museum of the Regiments Library and Archives formed part of the University Library. The University Archives was an independent unit within the Division of Information Resources.

As you can see, the Assistant Director of Archives and Special Collections reports to the Director of Information Resources. The Director also holds the title of University Librarian and, since January 2004, has been the Acting University Archivist.

I am now going to turn to look at each of the four units within Archives and Special Collections and the private records acquired by each.

Special Collections

In 1971 the Rare Books section of the University Library became the Special Collections department when the unit began collecting archival records.

The initial focus of the archival collection was the records of Canadian authors. There was a flurry of activity during the 1970s as new accessions were purchased, and by 1976 the records of a dozen well known authors had been added to the collection. After about 1980 funding for purchases was no longer available and the unit was forced to rely on donations to grow its collections.

Once the collecting of authors' papers was underway and proving successful, the Library expressed its ambition to create an "archives of Canadian creativity". In recognition of other manifestations of creativity, its collecting activities soon expanded into the areas of architecture and music. The architectural records were later detached from Special Collections to become the Canadian Architectural Archives whose collection I will discuss in a moment.

Although Special Collections has collected archival records covering a wide range of subjects, including many discrete items, it has concentrated its collecting activities in primarily two areas:

Firstly, its collection of literary and art archives has become quite extensive and well-known, and remains the main focus of the unit's acquisition program. These fonds consist of the records of Canadian authors, literary agents, small publishing companies, and Canadian visual artists such as book illustrators and caricaturists. Authors' fonds contain such records as correspondence; original manuscripts; drafts; research notes; photographs; sound recordings; and memorabilia. Such well-known and respected authors as Alice Munro, Mordecai Richler, Guy Vanderhaeghe, and W.O. Mitchell are represented in the collection.

Special Collections' second major area of acquisition is music archives. This collection includes the personal papers and business records of Canadian composers, musicians, music educators and music societies. Records consist of correspondence; research material; manuscripts of libretti, musical scores, speeches, articles and books; notes to accompany music; promotional and production material; programs and brochures; photographs and other related materials.

Special Collections also has a small number of archival fonds which relate to its collection of publications and puzzles in the field of "recreational mathematics". The archival material consists of correspondence, notes, calculations and solutions to mathematical problems, research material on a broad range of mathematical topics, manuscripts of mathematical articles and book reviews; and photographs.

The archival holdings in Special Collections now consist of approximately:

- 160 literary and art fonds
- 33 music fonds
- 8 mathematical fonds
- and almost 200 "other" historical fonds/collections.

The total volume amounts to approximately 1000 linear metres of records which are primarily in textual format, but which also include photographs, sound recordings, drawings, and moving images.

Canadian Architectural Archives

The Canadian Architectural Archives (CAA) was established in 1974 as a joint venture between the University of Calgary Library's Special Collections Department and the Faculty of Environmental Design to complement the Faculty's professional programs in Architecture, Urbanism and Environmental

Science. As I suggested earlier, they were also a part of the University Library's efforts to create an "archives of Canadian creativity".

CAA's mandate is "to collect the work of 20th century Canadian architects" – a mandate I trust they plan to revise given our recent entry into the 21st century! The Archives emphasizes "the documentation of the total output of architectural firms in an attempt to provide an accurate historical profile" of the firms whose records it holds.

Stated another way, the Archives collects all records produced by architectural firms rather than concentrating solely on the drawings which, apparently, is the practice of some architectural archives. Its holdings include drawings, project files, correspondence files, photographs, aperture cards, and architectural models.

By 1977 the Archives had acquired the papers of three of the then most important names in Canadian architecture, John B. Parkin, Ron Thom, and Arthur Erickson – along with a host of less well-known firms. Today the Archives' holdings consist of the records of nearly 50 architectural firms – many of which have international reputations -- with approximately 130,000 architectural drawings, 2000 metres of textual records, 80 metres of photographs, and 25 architectural models.

Museum of the Regiments Library and Archives

The Museum of the Regiments Library and Archives was established in the year 2000 as a joint venture between the Museum of the Regiments – which is a federally funded military museum located in Calgary – and the University of Calgary's Centre for Military and Strategic Studies which forms part of the Faculty of Social Sciences. The Centre itself was established only a year or two prior to the creation of the Library and Archives.

The Library and Archives was founded with the assistance of a \$750,000 anonymous donation which was given specifically to fund it. The vision in establishing the Library and Archives was to create a national research centre focusing on military history and strategic studies which would integrate primary and secondary source materials to serve the academic community, the military, and the public.

The Library and Archives collects materials to support research in all aspects of military history and strategic studies, with an emphasis on Canada and in particular Alberta.

Particular areas of concentration are the involvement of natives, ethnic groups and women in the military, peacekeeping and international monitoring, and records of researchers in the fields of military and strategic studies

Collecting secondary source materials has proved to have been more successful than efforts to acquire primary source materials: the Library and Archives now holds more than 8500 published items and about 21 metres of archival records

University Archives

The fourth and final unit at the University of Calgary which collects private records is the University Archives.

The University Archives was established in 1981 – about 15 years after the University was founded. Discussions about the need for an institutional archives had begun in 1971 -- 5 years following autonomy -- when concern about loss of the institution's records was initially voiced. However, it was a further 10 years before the office was created and another two years after that before a University Archivist was hired.

Although the primary responsibility of the University Archives was (and is) the records produced by the institution itself, it was agreed from the beginning that the Archives should also be responsible for acquiring the private records of individuals and bodies which were associated with the University in some way. This model of collecting followed that of the University of Alberta Archives and included such records as those created by academic staff members, faculty and staff unions, the Students' Union, student clubs, the University Child Care Centre, and research institutes that were resident on campus but independent of the University.

The Archives continued collecting private records in a passive way until about 1999. Since its inception, the Archives had had little time and few resources to allow for the active acquisition of private records:

- The University Archivist had remained the sole professional position until 1998 when a second permanent post was created;
- an Information Management Program had been established in 1996 which expanded the Archives' responsibilities to the campus community, and
- also in 1996 the University Archivist became responsible for establishing a program for responding to requests for access to university records under Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation which was proclaimed in 1999.

Nonetheless, in 1999 a more active program for acquiring private records was established by the University Archives. This new program greatly expanded the Archives' original mandate to collect the private records only of individuals and bodies associated with the University. It sought instead to create a new collection of private records that would support research interests on campus which were not served by the records being collected by Special Collections and the Canadian Architectural Archives.

The main area of focus of the Archives' new collecting activity has been what we are calling western "neo-conservative" political parties. The intent is to collect records created by those political parties, organisations and individuals which reflect the discontent of a majority of western Canadians in the country's federal political process.

This discontent has been a perpetual part of the Canadian political landscape for almost as long as the country has been in existence. Since the late 1980s, however, it has voiced itself through the creation of numerous western-based conservative grassroots political parties and organisations.

Many of these groups have the separation of the western provinces from the rest of the country as their *raison d'être*, and the success of one of them – the Reform Party of Canada – has led directly to the political stalemate which Canadians have been witnessing on our national political scene for the past dozen years.

The Archives has been quite successful in its efforts to acquire private records in this area –

- in 2001 the Reform Party of Canada donated more than 1400 boxes of records to the University. Individuals associated with the Party, including its founder and leader, its Chairman and CEO, and one of its Policy and Strategy directors have also donated their records.
- Records of a second influential neo-conservative party – the Western Canada Concept – have been donated by that Party's founder and former president.
- As a result of the collections in this area that had accumulated at the University Archives, a former and somewhat controversial mayor of the City of Calgary chose to deposit his records with us, as did the widow of a former and long-serving conservative premier of the province of Alberta who donated both her husband's records and those of the premier who preceded him.

While the active acquisition of neo-conservative records has been the focus of our collecting activities for the past few years, the Archives has also continued to acquire records in our traditional areas of private records collecting. For the most part these activities continue to be more passive than active in nature, becoming more aggressive when the donor's activities stray into the field of neo-conservatism.

The private holdings of the University Archives now number approximately 50 fonds, totalling about 350 metres of archival records. The holdings are comprised mainly of textual records, but also include graphic materials, audio and video recordings, architectural drawings and records in electronic format.

Why do we collect private records?

I want to turn now to look at the impetus for collecting private records at the University of Calgary.

I think it is clear that all units in Archives and Special Collections are collecting archival records to support academic research and study on campus. All the areas in which private records are being actively acquired correspond with areas of research being actively pursued in the academic faculties. But given the determination with which Calgary pursued the goal of obtaining a university it could call its own, it seemed to me that there was likely more behind the early, purposeful acquisition of private records than this simple explanation suggests. The answer was, of course, in the records preserved in the University Archives

When the University Library began collecting private records during the early 1970s, it met with open opposition from the Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA). The PAA's apparent concern was the possibility of the university collecting records which it considered to be rightly within its own domain, and that the university might receive government funds to purchase and preserve archives while the Provincial Archives was in a period of fiscal restraint.

In its response, the University indicated that it was "a young institution striving to become a centre for Canadian studies" and that it hoped to "be recognized as one of the prestigious schools in Alberta and, indeed in all of Canada".

An internal memo written by the Chief Librarian goes further. He states that "this University, like every other major university in Canada, is developing an archival collection quite apart from the papers related to the institution. ... While this University is concerned with meeting the academic needs of faculty and students at this location and in this province, we are also concerned that we have a national and even an international image."¹

The Chief Librarian went on to comment on the Symons Report published in 1975. The report, entitled *To Know Ourselves*, was produced by the Commission on Canadian Studies which had investigated the state of Canadian content in the curriculum of Canadian universities. The Chief Librarian noted that: "One of the criticisms of the universities is the lack of interest in the past in the collecting of Canadian material in archival form. The University of Calgary Library has sought to overcome this deficiency and has made a beginning. We would like to continue this process of collecting in order that the University of Calgary may have a uniqueness as the centre for the collection of Canadiana. With this purpose in mind I believe that the University can play an important role in the development of advanced education in the province and ... will attract scholars from the national as well as the international scene."²

But what of the more recent flurry of activity in the acquisition of private records at the University ?

Impetus for current collecting

In 1999 a reorganization at the University resulted in the creation of Information Resources – the Division of which Archives and Special Collections forms a part.

The newly appointed Director of the Division strongly believed that whereas in the past it was a university's **library** which distinguished it from other post-secondary institutions, the advent of digital technology and sophisticated systems of interlibrary loans has meant that this is no longer the case. Scholars can now easily access the sources they require, wherever the researcher happens to reside and regardless of the location of the books and journals he wishes to refer to.

¹ UARC 83.007, file 43.03

² Ibid.

The Director believed that it is now an institution's **primary resources** which will set it apart from other research universities. And so he set about creating a collection which he felt would distinguish the University of Calgary from other Canadian universities.

He moved forward with his plan by increasing the University Archives' mandate to collect private records and by working to establish the Library and Archives at the Museum of the Regiments. His network of contacts throughout the country resulted in new acquisitions for all four units within Archives and Special Collections. And he had a strong belief that "resources will follow need" and so encouraged the archives to collect records without concern for the needs for space to store them and staff to process them.

The Director was aided in his efforts to grow the private records collection through the appointment of a new President in 2001. Shortly after his arrival the President announced that his goal was to make the University of Calgary one of the top research universities in Canada. To this end, however, the University published its Academic Plan in 2002 which has had an impact on directing the subsequent collection of private records.

The Plan outlined four academic areas that the University would concentrate its energies in developing over the next several years: "innovation in energy and the environment", "understanding human behaviour, institutions and culture", "creating technologies and managing information for the knowledge society", and "Advancing health and wellness". In outlining these areas of academic priority, the University made it clear that human and financial resources would be preferentially allocated to those units whose activities followed the Plan. It is no surprise therefore that the Academic Plan has had some influence in directing the collecting activities in Archives and Special Collections.

Now, when offered new donations, archivists weigh how well new collections "fit" into one of these areas before accepting them, and when reporting on their activities they are explicit about how new accessions link to the goals of the Academic Plan. The fields are broadly enough stated that our collecting activities have not been entirely redirected by the Plan, but there is no doubt that it has had an influence on the direction that archivists are pursuing in developing their private records collections.

The Challenges and the Rewards

Without question there are challenges that come with collecting private records, particularly in the aggressive fashion that we at the University of Calgary have experienced over the past several years.

In addition to shortfalls in resources like storage space and adequate experienced staff to manage new acquisitions, archivists have sometimes felt pressured to accept records which they might not wish to include in their collections.

We have also found that donors' demands for tax receipts – which in Canada have almost universally replaced the purchase of archival records -- are increasingly setting the priorities for which records are processed in order to allow financial appraisals to be performed and tax receipts issued on time.

There is also a disconnect between the dates when external grant funding for arrangement and description projects can be applied for each year, and the timelines dictating when donors' tax receipts must be created. This can result in more work for already pressured staff members. All four collecting units experience these ongoing problems.

However, the increased emphasis on collecting private archives has undoubtedly had the greatest impact on the University Archives. Since Special Collections, the Canadian Architectural Archives and the Library and Archives at the Museum of the Regiments are all collecting archives, by their nature they must collect from outside the institution in order to grow. Managing that growth to fit their available resources is perhaps their biggest challenge during a period of aggressive collecting activity.

The University Archives, however, is primarily intended to be the repository for the institutional records of the University. The increased collecting of private records has resulted in a marked refocusing of resources away from the institutional records and towards the private collection. As a result, key projects to ensure the acquisition and preservation of the institution's records have been placed on hold in order to allow projects involving the private collection to go ahead.

For the past several years, external grants applied for by the University Archives have been almost exclusively to arrange and describe or to digitize records in the private collection. It is clear that the research community is generally more interested in the private holdings, than in the records of the institution. There is pressure to make these records available to researchers, and a feeling of responsibility amongst the archivists that if we are collecting such records we must make them available to researchers as soon as possible. It has also been made evident through the peer-reviewed grants process that applications for work on private records are generally more successful in attracting funding than are those involving institutional records. Hence the bulk of the institutional records remain in much the same state in which they first arrived in the archives, while the private records receive thorough, professional archival processing usually within a year or two after they are acquired.

The collecting activities at the University of Calgary over the past 30 years have undoubtedly led to the development of a strong and important collection of private records. Our collections are accessed regularly by scholars at the University of Calgary and from around the world. Collecting private records is interesting, challenging and very rewarding – from meeting with donors who have had fascinating lives; to processing the records they have created, collected, cherished and kept; to finding the storage space to house the records; and to assisting researchers in accessing the records.

As the Symons Report indicated 30 years ago, universities have an important role to play in collecting private records. We live in an age where the National Archives of Canada (now known as Library and Archives Canada) and some provincial archives are curbing their private records collecting activities as they concentrate their resources on their primary responsibility: the records of

government. Some such institutions are going so far as to de-accession private fonds in their holdings, preferring to send them to archival repositories whose mandates more closely fit the records' contents and creators than to continue to keep them within their own collections.

I think it can be argued therefore that universities have an increasingly important role to play in the collecting of private records. The key to success in this venture, I would suggest, is to attain a reasonable balance between the university's desire to build a private collection of national or international importance, and its responsibility to manage and preserve both the records it collects and the records it itself creates.

Illustration 1:



Illustration 2



Illustration 3:

